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SUBJECT CIA Role In Iranian Arms Deal

J CHRIS WALLACE: When the story of the Iranian arms deal first broke, it appeared to be a White House operation. But recent disclosures indicate the Central Intelligence Agency also played a significant role.

Jim Miklaszewski reports that CIA critics are asking some familiar questions.

J JIM MIKLASZEWSKI: While the White House has been burned by the arms deal with Iran, the CIA and its Director, William A Casey, are beginning to feel the heat.

REPORTER: Have you broken the law?

DIRECTOR WILLIAM CASEY: No.

MIKLASZEWSKI: But key members of Congress want to know more about the CIA's role in the Iran arms deal.

P SENATOR SAM NUNN: I think there are some real problems there. We have not heard, I don't think, all we're going to have to hear from the CIA on this one. They were more involved than we thought they were.

MIKLASZEWSKI: And suggest any shake-up in the White House should extend to the CIA.

P SENATOR DAVID DURENBERGER: The problem is not so much the NSC as it is the Operations Directorate in the Central Intelligence Agency.

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MIKLASZEWSKI: It's become clear the CIA was a central player in the Iran arms deal. The CIA reportedly drafted the White House report last January to justify the arms deal, ordered the anti-tank rockets and anti-aircraft missile parts from the Pentagon, then arranged their final delivery to Iran.

DAVID WISE: Well, the CIA seems to have a penchant for getting into trouble ever since it was founded in 1947. And under William Casey, there's been no exception to the rule.

MIKLASZEWSKI: In fact, Casey's record is littered with embarrassing failures: the mining of Nicaraguan harbors; a contra booklet with "how to" instructions for political assassinations; and the loss of two spies to the Soviets, one of theirs and one of ours.

A Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner says all that has seriously eroded public confidence in the agency.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: There's lots of doubt in the country as to whether the CIA's being run legally or illegally, and that certainly is a thing that's going to hurt the CIA in the long run.

MIKLASZEWSKI: CIA supporters fear that, in the long run, the agency will be forced to pay for the mistakes in Iran if Congress attempts to exert even more control over future covert operations.

Jim Miklaszewski, NBC News, Washington.